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ABSTRACT

A 2-year study to explore guidance needs and the effectiveness of provision in Scotland was commissioned in 1993. The research focused on a limited number of schools contrasting in size, school roll, and type of location. Six schools across 4 regions participated in the research, involving a total of 1,072 subjects. The project used interviews, group discussions and questionnaires with teachers, staff, students, parents, and key informants in order to examine the operation of guidance as a whole in these schools and to conduct specific studies of guidance in the upper school and of parents' views of guidance overall. It was found that there was strong support among pupils, parents, and teachers for the guidance system and for its aim of providing guidance for all pupils, but all three groups also felt that, in practice, guidance concentrated on meeting the needs of a minority of problem students. (TS)

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No 41

Guidance in Secondary Schools

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Guidance in Secondary Schools

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Guidance has become an established part of the Scottish education system since its formal introduction in 1968. All local authority secondary schools have a structure of guidance posts and seek to provide personal, curricular and vocational guidance to every pupil. There has, however, been little research on the effectiveness of guidance provision since the early 80s although there have been major changes in schools and in pupils' post-school opportunities over this period. In 1993, therefore, The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID), formerly The Scottish Office Education Department (SOED), commissioned the Centre for Educational Sociology to carry out a two-year study to explore guidance needs and the effectiveness of provision. The research was to focus on a limited number of schools contrasting in size, school roll, and type of location. Six schools across four regions participated in the research. The project examined the operation of guidance as a whole in these schools and included specific studies of guidance in the upper school and of parents' views of guidance overall.

Aims of the project

The central aim of the study was to examine the guidance needs of pupils and their parents, the organisation of guidance provision and its effectiveness. Variation in guidance needs between schools and the influence on guidance provision were key issues. While the research covered all aspects of guidance — personal, curricular and vocational — specific aims were to review the management of the Careers Service's work in the schools and links with local employers. In practice, work on employer links was limited, reflecting the lack of close links between guidance and employers in the project schools.

Research methods

The research was based on six schools across four regions chosen through discussions with HMI, guidance advisers, review of documentation and analysis of data from the Scottish Young People's Survey. The aim was to select schools that were illustrative of different types of schools and guidance provision so that other schools might recognise elements of their own situation in one or more of them and relate the issues discussed to their own context. The schools were believed to have better than average guidance practice.

The evaluation of guidance needs and provision is a difficult task. The approach chosen focused on the perceptions and experiences of both the consumers of guidance (pupils and parents) and the providers of guidance (guidance staff, other teachers and careers officers). This enabled comparison of each group's perceptions, of perceptions with the guidance practice in the schools and of practice against regional and national guidance policies.

The research involved:

- an extensive programme of interviews with guidance teachers, other school staff and careers officers (119 interviews);
- group discussions with S2, S4 and S5 pupils (233 pupils);
- a postal questionnaire to parents (720) in the project schools and interviews with 29 respondents.

Interviews with 12 key informants provided additional information and opportunities to discuss guidance provision more widely.

The guidance needs of pupils

None of the project schools carried out systematic, comprehensive evaluations of pupils' needs.

How can schools be encouraged and supported to do so?

None of the project schools conducted regular, comprehensive reviews of pupils' needs. In consequence, the views of staff were based on personal opinion and experience. Staff focused on the provision made at each school stage and guidance teachers' duties rather than directly identifying pupils' needs. They had given little thought to the guidance needs of parents.

The most fundamental pupil need identified was for individual attention and a consistent relationship with a teacher who knew them. Staff identified a range of needs at each school stage (eg transition from primary to secondary school and subject choice at S2) with the exception of S3 where few specific needs were highlighted.

Deprivation was seen as a major source of variation in pupils' guidance needs within and across the project schools, having an impact on pupils' self-esteem and aspirations. Staff identified few specific needs experienced by middle class pupils. Geographical location was not perceived as a major factor in determining particular guidance needs. Staff believed, however, that pupils' needs were changing and increasing due to higher staying-on rates, greater pressure within schools and wider changes in society.

On the whole, guidance provision in the project schools was based on a generalised view of pupils' needs and related to pupil age and school stage. It was difficult to discern the impact of particular pupil needs on the nature and structure of guidance provision. Timetabled Personal and Social Education (PSE) provision and the response to pupils' socio-economic background were areas where some direct relationship between pupils' particular needs and the nature of provision was evident.

Guidance in practice: the teacher perspective

There is a link between a better pupil : guidance teacher time allocation and the effectiveness of provision.

What is an appropriate time allocation for guidance teachers? How can it be identified? How can guidance teachers be assured of receiving it in practice?

Guidance for all pupils?

All of the project schools supported a 'guidance for all pupils' principle but most guidance staff believed this could not be fulfilled. They felt that their time allocation and workload made them unduly reactive in their work, forcing them to concentrate on pupils in trouble or those with obvious problems at the expense of 'ordinary' pupils. Regular contact between guidance staff teaching PSE and their pupils and annual interviews with pupils were identified as factors improving relationships with all pupils but the effectiveness of a programme of interviews depended on appropriate timing and organisation.

Time and workload

SOEID suggests that all guidance staff should have 40 minutes to spend per week for every 15 pupils. No project school achieved this. There was a positive, though not precise, relationship between time per pupil and effective provision.

Guidance teachers were highly committed to their caseload and most used non-guidance time to see their pupils. Although most felt that their guidance role impinged on their work as subject teachers, none favoured the idea of full-time guidance teachers.

Senior management and guidance staff pointed to increasing demands on guidance, recognising a need to establish priorities for guidance, but there was no consensus about who should do so within the school. Both believed, however, that priorities needed to be set nationally.

None of the project schools had a comprehensive system for monitoring the everyday work of guidance teachers.

How can the work of guidance teachers be monitored and reviewed in a meaningful way?

The management of guidance

The level of commitment of senior management to guidance was seen as critical to staff morale and to the credibility and resourcing of guidance in the school.

The involvement of guidance staff in the development of policy and management decisions varied across the schools. The potential of guidance team meetings in the management of guidance was not being realised.

Efforts were being made to achieve greater differentiation in the work of principal and assistant principal teachers of guidance, usually by defining extra responsibilities for the principal teachers of guidance. However a number of guidance teachers did not support senior management efforts to develop the line management role of principal teachers of guidance.

There was almost a reluctance among some staff to accept the need to manage guidance, based on a feeling that attention to management would detract from its caring emphasis. None of the schools had a comprehensive system for monitoring the everyday work of guidance teachers, most of whom did not think they were accountable to others for their work and did not support the idea of greater accountability. The approach of management was to emphasise self-accountability. Some guidance teachers did not keep a record of contacts with their caseload, only one school had a common record-keeping system and a number of staff did not accept the contribution of good record-keeping to effective guidance. Most staff recognised the need for guidance teachers to operate as a team but the extent to which this happened in practice differed across the schools.

There was some reluctance to accept the need to manage guidance and to recognise the value of management to the guidance process.

How can a more positive attitude be promoted among staff about the contribution of good management practices to effective guidance?

Under a third of guidance teachers interviewed held a nationally recognised qualification in guidance. The large majority had had a variety of in-service training but some senior managers identified a lack of focus and progression in such training.

Contact with Assistant Headteachers, most frequently over discipline, was an important feature of the guidance teachers' work but lack of communication and consultation about discipline casework was an issue.

Guidance teachers felt that subject teachers were now more positive about the value of guidance, but that they were still uncertain about guidance teachers' role and could be more active in referring pupils to guidance. The extent to

First Level guidance was limited.

which register teachers were willing and able to fulfil a pastoral role varied across the project schools and formal First Level Guidance was limited to two of the project schools. Learning Support and English as a Second Language teachers may be a resource under-used by guidance teachers.

Is further development of First Level Guidance feasible?

Aspects of guidance

Although a majority of guidance teachers supported a leading role for guidance in PSE, most saw individual work with pupils as their main task.

Staff in most of the project schools acknowledged difficulties in the design and delivery of PSE: a lack of training and support for PSE teachers; the use of non-volunteers to teach PSE; class size; inappropriate methodologies; lack of coherence and progression in programmes and difficulties in differentiating provision by pupil need.

Staff generally felt that PSE still lacked status despite developments in recent years. Some felt under pressure to improve the credibility of PSE, for example by introducing certification, but there was only limited support for this.

Guidance staff valued the processes which underpinned Records of Achievement (National Records of Achievement since 1991) but were concerned that their potential might not be realised without resources to allow individual attention to pupils. More negatively, they felt the process put pressure on PSE time and increased their administrative burden.

Staff acknowledged difficulties in the design and development of PSE.

Staff felt that the more varied upper school roll and increasing complexity of the post-16 curriculum and post-school options required developments in the S5 and S6 subject choice process, in careers information and guidance and in PSE. Guidance staff were also concerned about pupils returning to school when this was not likely to be a productive option. Non-guidance staff, especially senior management, played a key role in guidance for senior pupils.

How can staff delivering PSE best be trained and supported?

There was some feeling among guidance staff that liaison with external agencies could be improved but they noted their own lack of time to attend Children's Hearings and other meetings and that the external agencies were over-worked and under-resourced. Contact with social workers was perceived to be particularly difficult. Typically teachers felt other agencies had a different perspective on pupils with problems; there were also different expectations about the confidentiality and exchange of information about pupils.

Parents' views and experiences of guidance

Attitudes to guidance

Parents strongly supported the existence of the guidance system. They believed that guidance should support all pupils but generally saw it as being problem-driven and reacting to pupils in difficulty. Although parents were uncertain

about how guidance operated in practice, they had a clear view of the role that guidance should perform, what an ideal guidance teacher should be like and how well the guidance teacher should know their child.

Parents wanted a better understanding of how to use the guidance system and the chance to build up a relationship with their child's guidance teacher.

Parents wanted to know and trust their child's guidance teacher, whom they saw as responsible for his or her welfare in the school, to be able to contact and be contacted by guidance staff, to be kept informed of their child's progress and to be assured of confidentiality.

Regular information about their child's progress was a critical issue for parents. They wanted more, and earlier, information not only about academic progress but about personal and social development and about successes as well as problems.

What strategies can be used to make parents better informed and to improve guidance teacher-parent links?

Parents identified a range of guidance needs of their children: easy access to individual support; information and advice about careers and subject choice; help with issues relating to drugs, alcohol, sex, and HIV/AIDS and support in coping with exam and study pressures.

Satisfaction with guidance

Three-quarters of the parents were generally satisfied with guidance provision for their children. Although most parents thought their child was fairly or well known by the guidance teacher, they also believed that the guidance teacher did not give their child enough individual attention. Where guidance teachers had helped individual children because of a particular need or problem, their parents were generally pleased. Bullying was one area where some parents were critical of the guidance and school response.

Parents made a number of suggestions to improve guidance: annual reminders about the guidance system and how to use it; guidance staff being available outwith school hours and more opportunity to consult them at parents' evenings; communications sent directly to the home; more information about all aspects of their child's progress; more interviews and small group work to increase guidance teachers' knowledge of their pupils and full-time guidance teachers.

Parents wanted more regular and more detailed information about their child's personal and social development as well as their academic progress.

How might parents be provided with a rounded picture of their child's progress? What are the respective responsibilities of the guidance teacher, subject teacher and senior management in this?

Aspects of provision

The parents taking part in the study felt that their child's move from primary to secondary school had been well managed and guidance appropriately involved.

Parents were overwhelmingly in favour of the range of topics likely to be delivered as part of Personal and Social Education but wanted more information about the content and timing of provision in their children's schools.

The majority of parents were satisfied with the advice given to their child at S2/S3 and S4/S5 subject choice but made suggestions for improvement, including more consideration of the career implications of subject choice, especially at S4/S5.

Parents' knowledge of both the school's careers education programme and the careers guidance from the school and the Careers Service was limited. The large majority thought that the careers guidance their child received could be improved. There was strong support from parents for work experience.

Pupils' views and experiences of guidance

Pupils' opinions and experiences of guidance depended heavily on their particular guidance teacher.

How can each school ensure that pupils do not experience a wide variation in guidance provision because of the guidance teacher in question?

Attitudes to guidance

All pupils saw guidance as necessary and valued having a teacher whose role was to be available for them as an individual. Pupils' opinions and experiences of guidance were varied and depended heavily on the attitude and approach of their own guidance teacher. They nevertheless had a very clear and consistent view of a good guidance teacher — someone who:

- listened and was understanding;
- liked children, took time and showed an interest;
- was fair, listened to the pupil's side and did not label them;
- was trustworthy and would preserve confidentiality;
- treated and respected pupils as individuals.

The majority of pupils felt that 'ordinary' pupils had minimal contact with guidance teachers but believed that guidance should cater for all pupils. They valued contact through small group sessions. Regular interviews and small group sessions were seen by pupils as a good way to provide basic contact which would encourage them to ask for help when they needed it. Nevertheless, interviews could be a difficult experience for pupils unused to such an event and had to be well-timed and conducted to be meaningful for them.

In the view of most pupils, guidance is clearly associated with those in trouble or with problems.

How can guidance teachers be enabled to respond to the needs of all pupils? Is there a case for full-time guidance teachers as suggested by pupils?

There was a gap between pupils' and guidance staff's perceptions about the effectiveness of guidance provision, especially about the quality of the relationship between guidance teachers and pupils. The majority of pupils did not think that their guidance teacher knew them well, although this view did vary in degree across and within schools.

Use of guidance

Guidance teachers were commonly perceived by pupils as inaccessible because of lack of time and large caseloads. A substantial proportion identified guidance staff's subject commitments as a problem and supported the idea of full-time guidance teachers.

Around half of the pupils were prepared to approach their guidance teacher with concerns or problems. This depended on how well they thought their guidance teacher knew them; how approachable and accessible their guidance teacher was; the pupil's age; the nature of the problem and belief in confidentiality. Pupils were sceptical that confidentiality would be maintained; this contrasted with guidance teachers' perceptions that pupils were satisfied about this. More

generally some pupils experienced a lack of privacy in dealings with guidance teachers.

Pupils accepted the need for PSE but their opinion of provision ranged from the very positive to the very negative, with the majority view somewhere in the middle. Pupils complained of limited and impersonal coverage of sex education, drugs and AIDS/HIV. They wanted more input on study skills and careers-related issues in PSE. The quality of teaching attracted a substantial amount of criticism from pupils.

All pupils had had considerable input about option choices at S2. Although pupils also receive help in choosing their S5 subjects, they commented that the amount of information they received was less than at S2. In particular, they wanted more discussion of the career implications of their choices.

There is a lack of integration in the curricular and vocational guidance provided to pupils by guidance and other teachers and by careers officers.

How can pupils be provided with more coherent provision?

Careers and the World of Work

Careers education and guidance

The content of careers education was variable across the schools. There was little evidence of progression in provision and staff recognised the need to develop careers education for senior pupils. There was a lack of integration of the various elements of curricular and vocational guidance provided by guidance, by other teachers in the project schools and by the Careers Service.

Post-school options were a major issue for S4 and especially S5 pupils. S2 pupils were also concerned about career ideas when making their subject choice. Pupils of all attainment levels felt they were not aware of the full range of possible courses and jobs and found it difficult to assess their best option. S4 and S5 pupils of all academic abilities wanted more detailed information about careers and courses and more help with the practicalities of applications and interviews.

Pupils and parents were not satisfied with the Careers Service interview system.

How should Careers Services design their interview systems, taking account of pupils' and parents' wish for ready access for all pupils to careers interviews?

Careers Service

Pupils' awareness of the role of the careers officer varied considerably across the project schools. The large majority of pupils who had had contact with the Careers Service were positive about it. The main element of careers officers' work in the schools was interviews with S4-S6 pupils. There was some concern that the increasingly tight targets set for careers officers might limit their flexibility to respond to pupils' needs. Pupils wanted greater input from the Careers Service in subject choice, careers education and better access to an interview with a careers officer.

There was considerable confusion and dissatisfaction among pupils about Careers Service interview systems. Both pupils and parents wanted better access to an interview which was not dependent on leaving or having a problem with career choice.

Careers officers were not well integrated into the school and guidance system.

How can careers officers develop closer links with all members of the school's guidance team?

Pupils seemed unable or unwilling to take responsibility for their career development, and they were not proactive in seeking careers information or in initiating a careers interview.

In the majority of the project schools, the careers officer liaised mainly with one guidance teacher. This ensured the smooth organisation of interviews and reports but distanced them from guidance staff as a whole: generally the careers officer was not integrated into these schools.

Education industry liaison and guidance

Except for work experience, education industry liaison (EIL) activities and guidance were largely separate from each other. Most guidance teachers interviewed had little knowledge of, or involvement in, EIL activities.

There were different models of organising work experience. In half of the schools non-guidance staff organised the work experience placements. Four schools certificated work experience via the National Certificate module *Work Experience 1*. Teachers, pupils and parents identified a number of benefits of work experience, especially the opportunity to test out career ideas, but careers officers were more critical of its value in this respect.

Conclusions

Despite its aim of supporting every pupil, guidance provision concentrates on the problem pupil.

How can guidance move beyond a problem-driven approach and ensure a minimum standard of provision for all pupils?

There was strong support among pupils, parents and teachers for the guidance system and for its aim of providing guidance for all pupils but all three groups also felt that, in practice, guidance concentrated on meeting the needs of a minority of problem pupils. Pupils experienced substantial variation in provision depending on their particular guidance teacher. There was a gap in teachers' and pupils' perceptions about the effectiveness of provision. Most guidance teachers in the project schools did not receive the minimum suggested time allocation and this had an impact on the quality of provision, but weaknesses in the management and evaluation of guidance were also relevant factors. Lack of integration was evident in the areas of curricular and vocational guidance, Careers Service input and EIL activities.

Final Report

Further details of the research are in the full report 'Guidance in Secondary Schools', available from the Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh, 7 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh EH8 9LW. Price £15.00.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department who funded the study.

Points for discussion

Identification of pupils' guidance needs and the relationship with provision.

The delivery of 'guidance for all'.

The different perceptions of pupils and teachers about guidance provision and its effectiveness.

Priorities for guidance and guidance teachers' workload and time allocations.

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The accountability of guidance staff and the evaluation of provision.

Careers Service interviewing systems.

Integration in the curricular and vocational guidance pupils receive.

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